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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [FI](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: FINNS TELL SYRIA TO HONOR UNSCR 1701; SYRIANS  
REJECT DISARMING OF HEZBOLLAH

REF: A. HELSINKI 842  
[1](#)B. STATE 136196

Classified By: PolChief Gregory Thome, Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On Aug. 23 in Helsinki, Finnish FM Tuomioja told Syrian FM Al-Moallem that the EU expected the Government of Syria (GOS) to support the ceasefire in Lebanon and wider peace in the Middle East by respecting all provisions of UNSCR 1701; by honoring the arms embargo in Lebanon; and by toning down its "belligerent" public rhetoric. The Syrian FM responded that the GOS supports 1701 and could support an expanded UNIFIL -- but only if the UN does not give UNIFIL a "peace enforcement" mandate, does not call for disarming Hezbollah, and does not place UNIFIL on Syria's borders. He also said that Syria already proved its willingness to support the peace process by not entering the war, and warned that "by isolating Syria, the EU is isolating itself." Tuomioja told Al-Moallem that the international community would not view such demands as realistic and that it would watch Syrian actions carefully, urging Syria not to be a "spoiler" of the fragile peace in the region. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moallem in Helsinki August [1](#)23. On August 24, PolChief and Poloff obtained a read-out on the meeting from MFA Regional Manager for Israel, Lebanon and Syria Sofie From-Emmesberger, who had served as note-taker. As noted reftel a, the GOF was not acting unilaterally, but rather in response to conclusions adopted at the Aug. 1 extraordinarily GAERC on Lebanon. The GOF emphasized that the meeting did not represent an upgrading of EU-Syrian relations, produced no commitments, and was intended to deliver a message to the Syrians demanding that they support the ceasefire in Lebanon and wider peace in the Middle East by respecting all provisions of UNSCR 1701. Tuomioja held a low-profile press conference Aug. 23 from which Al-Moallem was excluded. There, he downplayed the nature of the meeting while emphasizing EU expectations that Syria needed to play a positive role in the region.

SYRIA AS POTENTIAL "SPOILER"

[1](#)3. (C) From-Emmesberger said that Tuomioja opened the meeting by emphasizing that a fragile peace had been reached in Lebanon, but that the "ball was now in Syria's court" to help ensure that peace endured. He noted that Syria had a choice: it could play a constructive role, or it could be "the spoiler." Tuomioja said that the EU expected Syria to support the provisions of UNSC Resolution 1701 and, in particular, to honor the strict embargo on the shipment of arms to Lebanon. He also asked that Syria remain politically supportive of the Lebanese government's efforts to gain control its territory and that it accept the presence and role of an enhanced UNIFIL in Lebanon.

14. (C) Al-Moallem responded by saying that Syria supported UNSCR 1701, although he complained that the resolution did nothing to solve other regional problems, including those in the Golan Heights, the Palestinian territories, or at Shebaa Farms. The Syrian also stated that his government accepted the deployment of the Lebanese army into Southern Lebanon and a larger UNIFIL. However, From-Emmesberger said, Al-Moallem insisted that UNIFIL's mission should be "peace keeping, not peace enforcement." Syria would not accept a UN mandate that granted UNIFIL Chapter 7 authority or called upon it to disarm Hezbollah, he said, noting also that if UNIFIL deployed along the Syrian border, the GOS would view this as "an act of aggression." Al-Moallem also stated unabashedly that if UNIFIL's mandate were purely peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance, "Syria could guarantee UNIFIL will be respected by Hezbollah."

#### UNREALISTIC DEMANDS

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15. (C) As for Syria's own role, Al-Moallem argued that Syria had already played a positive role by not "entering the war and opening a third front." President Assad took a lot of heat domestically for this decision, he continued, and the EU should see this decision as a positive. He also said that the EU must be careful not to press Syria into a corner, noting that "by isolating Syria, the EU is isolating itself" because Syria can always turn to "other partners in the East or in Latin America" -- a formulation From-Emmesberger interpreted to mean, among others, Iran and Venezuela.

16. (C) Tuomioja responded that while the international community desired Syria's cooperation, it would view many of these demands as unrealistic. Regarding UNIFIL's mandate, Tuomioja said that specifics were still being negotiated but that the UN had already (in UNSCR 1559) made clear that

disarming the militias in Lebanon was a key to the process. He urged Al-Moallem not to mis-interpret UNIFIL's presence as a threat, and cautioned in general against "belligerent" public statements out of the GOS that served only to exacerbate tensions and potentially undermine the peace process -- this being a specific reference to President Assad's terrible mid-August speech, which forced the German FM to cancel his trip to Damascus. According to From-Emmesberger, Tuomioja totally rejected Al-Moallem's other arguments, saying that threats about turning to "other partners" would only deepen Syria's own isolation, and that Syria's decision not to enter the war was simply the very minimum the EU would expect -- certainly not something it would "reward."

#### COMMENT

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17. (C) Comment: From-Emmesberger's read-out appears to indicate that Tuomioja delivered as tough a message as might be expected. At a minimum, he put the Syrians on notice that the world is watching and, as we have requested (ref b), he delivered a hard message on 1701 and the need for Syria to respect the arms embargo. Depending on how Syria behaves in the coming weeks, Germany may be the next to initiate contact with Damascus; this will be the subject of discussion at the Sept. 1-2 GYMnich. End Comment.

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